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Appeals, contributions, requests, and representations: some aspects of the *OED*'s engagement with the general public.

The Oxford English Dictionary (*OED*) has a long history of engagement with a wider public.

Already in the 1880s under the editorship of Sir James Murray there were two prominent areas of wider engagement:

- consultation of experts (particularly on loanwords from exotic languages, and on technical subject fields)
- appeals to the general public for information on particular words, especially for earlier examples

Additionally, there were occasional publications from members of the editorial staff on matters of linguistic history.

Today, the *OED* engages with a wider public through a wide variety of channels:

With the scholarly community, through:

- consultation
- academic publications and conference papers

With the student community, through:

- materials on lexicography and the history of the English language, especially on the *OED*'s website
- publishing textbooks
- visits by student groups
- visits to give guest lectures
- occasional student internships
- preparation of materials targeted at school students, backed up by presentations to teachers

With the wider public, through:

- features on interesting word histories, and on lexicography and the history of the English language, on the *OED*'s website
- interviews and features in broadcast and print media (frequent interviews on radio news and features programmes, successful tv series, occasional tv interviews)
- queries from the general public

Future possibilities include:

- encouraging greater interactivity on the *OED*'s website; locations to contribute potentially relevant material; fostering user discussion forums

Engagement of this sort is demanding in staff time, and much of it builds upon the already very high public standing of this project. However, the rewards are considerable, in promoting the dictionary to its many target audiences, in drawing editors' attention to valuable research materials, and, perhaps most importantly, in alerting editors to the interests and needs of the dictionary's wide and varied readership.